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AFFIRMATIONS

*God in the Modern
World*

A HEBREW VIEW OF EVIL

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A HEBREW VIEW OF EVIL

I

SOME years ago William James presented the world with a short way with the Agnostics. No one really doubts, he urged ; a man may think that he does ; but he always acts *as if* he believed, whether in God, in immortality, or morality, or else in their opposites. We may suspend judgment in theory, we cannot in practice. We act, and then we find reasons for our action. The real reasons are often unsuspected ; they lie deep down in the subconscious, or else they are resident in the will ; that is, we choose to believe, for example, that the world was made by a benevolent creator, even though earthquake and tempest should shriek at our folly ; or else we deny that God exists, when we have not perhaps examined with any care a single one of the grounds for belief in him. The ground for belief must be sought in the "will to believe"—the phrase which James felicitously coined, and which can find considerable support in the New Testament itself, with its insistence on faith as a duty.

HOW DID EVIL GET INTO THE WORLD ?

This is true, also, when we consider that thorniest of all problems, the existence of evil. Few men attempt to think it out ; they have neither the time nor the brains. Evil exists ; it has to be got rid of, avoided, pushed into a corner. But how did it get there ? Who put it there ? Did God ? If so, why ? Could he have done so ? If he did, would he be God ? To Plato, a god who would do anything but good could not

be God. Or did evil get into the world in spite of God, like Satan slipping to the earth in *Paradise Lost*? But can anything happen "in spite of" God? That is at best to reduce God to a kind of "daimon," and to make it impossible to think of him as the ruler of the universe. But did he perhaps allow it as the price which had to be paid, regretfully, for some good otherwise unattainable—a sort of *pis aller*? "He would have arranged the world on other and happier lines if he could." That is to enthrone above him some necessity or fate, a proceeding which might satisfy Homer, but hardly a serious thinker to-day, and it would leave us asking about necessity the question we have already asked about God. If God is more than a subordinate power, to allow must be to will, to approve, to decide on as really and ideally best. That is to say, what is evil to us must be good to God. "A mere playing with words!"

Here the plain man generally refuses to go on. But can we stop? Perhaps, as Mill long since urged, God cannot be at once supreme and the author of good and good alone. He is at best a benevolent demiurge. If we allow this as a possibility, there are three alternative views of evil. It is subordinate (a view probably held by many Christians); it is struggling in an eternal grip with good (Manicheism); or it is superior to good (the view of the pessimist properly so called—the good of life cannot outweigh its evil—and of much of the world's paganism).

WHAT IS MEANT BY EVIL?

At this point we may be pertinently reminded that evil is an ambiguous term. It is quite impossible to draw a definite line between evil and good. Things are made good or bad by our thinking; evil is quite often obviously a means to good; by the psychological principle of association, it comes to be accepted and welcomed

as a good in itself. Our joy may be three parts pain, yet more rather than less joyous for that very reason ; while a single shaft of sunlight may transform into beauty what was a mass of ugliness, and a frown or an ill memory may turn happiness to wormwood. The character of the inhabitants of these two territories, good and evil, is as fluctuating as their climate. But does this make any difference, it will at once be asked, to our estimate of cancer, adultery, the horrors of the 'Thirty Years' War, or the miseries of the Black Death ?

Again, we must distinguish between physical and moral evil. The problem of physical evil is comparatively manageable. The processes of nature are on the whole beneficent ; tempest, plague, and drought spring from the same causes as those givers of health and food, sunshine and rain ; they are thought of as evil because they interfere with our private designs, and they may have their teeth drawn by foresight and caution and skill ; a world where they did not exist would be inconceivable. Moral evil, it is said, is inseparable from free will ; man must be allowed to choose wrong, with all the inevitable results of his choice, or there will be no goodness. And in any case, sin is not to be laid at the door of God !

But this only pushes back the difficulty. Why is goodness only to be obtained at such a cost ? Why could not unselfishness and piety have been given and preserved as man's inalienable dower ? Neither the traditional doctrine of the Fall, nor the modernist criticism of it (in reality as old as the fifth century) helps us here, and the theologian may well be asked why God could not have established on earth that complete and unchallenged goodness which we presume to exist in heaven.

CAN ANYTHING BE LEARNT FROM HEBREW THOUGHT ?

Having gone so far, the philosophic reader may be conscious of something of a shock if he is asked to turn for light to the Hebrews of the Old Testament. Those

ancient and obscure writers are not usually thought of as illuminating the world's intellectual problems, however valuable they may be for the study of the evolution of the world's religious thought. Yet they gave us the conception of monotheism. In these days we are not likely to be allowed to forget the noble and inspiring views of the divine presented to the world in the sacred books of the East, or in the great philosophical tradition originated by Plato, or for that matter, we might add, by Aristotle ; and it is a kind of axiom with many of us that Jehovah (or, to be more accurate, Jahveh) began his existence as a tribal god. But few will deny that of the only three religions which have held to the conception of one single supreme divine ruler, Judaism evolved the belief, Christianity derived it from Judaism, and Islam from Judaism and Christianity ; and that whether monotheism is the last word of the philosophy of religion or not, the non-monotheistic religions of the world have ceased to show any power of expansion or, apart from the challenging presence of Christianity, of moral or spiritual advance.

THE PROBLEM OF MONOTHEISM TO THE HEBREW

The Hebrews, let us admit at once, were not metaphysicians. They had neither the genius nor the language for metaphysics. To translate a single page of Plato or Hume into Hebrew would exhaust all the philosophic terms they possessed. It would have been impossible for them to discuss the meaning of law, theory, science, or reality. But it does not follow from this that they were not capable of serious and hard thinking. Indeed, when once they had become convinced monotheists, they were compelled to think very hard indeed. For, first, all life was to them one long struggle. Their very territory only yielded a livelihood to them at the price of constant watchfulness and disappointment, scarcity and poverty. Their position as

a nation forced them into conflict with a succession of ambitious powers far mightier than themselves. They never, save for the briefest periods, attained to a government that could ensure order and justice and security. Life was hard and brutal, with starvation and unattended disease close at hand. They had to live in constant dread of the arrow that flieth by day and the pestilence that walketh in darkness.

Again, their religion did not only breed in them that fear of ghosts and wandering malignant demons which is the bane of all paganism ; it taught them to think of sin, and even of involuntary misdemeanour, with a horror known only to the English and Scottish Puritans. Moreover, strict monotheists as they were, when they had to grapple with the problems of life, they could not avail themselves of the refuge of the more genial philosophers. They could not talk of an order of nature, or of uniform sequences. Nor did they find relief in the hypothesis of a devil, nor could they (except in one or two very doubtful instances) turn to the anodyne of belief in a future life, and learn to endure the miseries of the present world by thinking of the joys that, in the world to come, would never fade. To them, God was directly responsible for everything. " Shall there be evil done in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it ? " All the tragedies of their experience they laid at the door of Jehovah, and even though many might shrink from saying as much as this, the bolder spirits were sure that illusion, temptation, and the hardening of man's heart found their sole source in his inscrutable power and design.

With such a setting to the problem, a man who took his monotheism seriously had to think hard, if he was to avoid despair. And, lastly, he had to think all the harder because he could not think of the matter in the abstract. The discussion of an abstract question will often bring notable relief. The intellectual interest drains away our attention from our present grief, or our sense of

perplexity and helplessness. Many an intellectual man has escaped the stress of Mill's dilemma (to the religious mind, a really terrible one)—“either God is helpless, or he is cruel”—by turning his attention to the quite distinct question of the origin of evil, and flinging himself into a discussion which exhausts the mind before the full force of the dreaded conclusion can be felt. But the Hebrew did not—perhaps could not—ask this question. He never discussed origins. Evil, and Jehovah, were powers beneath whose shadow he was actually living. He dreaded and hated the one; he feared and even loved the other. And if the two were, as he could not but feel them to be, inextricably intertwined, how was he to think of each of them, and how was he to comport himself towards the mystery of their inter-relation?

SIN AND SUFFERING

It is well known that the traditional and “orthodox” Hebrew view of evil was that all suffering is punishment; that, of our two kinds of evil distinguished above, physical and moral, the first is the result of the second. This indeed is widely believed to-day. On the face of it, indeed, it seems absurd enough; yet, if we think of something more than the individual as the unit (as our own philosophical guides would urge on us) it is not wholly irrational. True, nature (if we may make for the moment what is always a dangerous personification) cares nothing for our sins or our virtues; she knows no punishments or rewards; the sun rises on the evil as on the good, and an ill-built tower of Siloam does not delay its fall till none but criminals are beneath it. But most of the physical evils of the world can be lessened, if they cannot be banished. Some societies have actually succeeded in driving out certain ancient forms of disease and calamity. And if we were all wise and controlled and prudent and kindly, and thought more about our duty to others and less about our own possessions and self-indulgences, we should find that the remaining ills

that flesh is heir to had become strangely bearable. The Hebrews were accustomed to think in terms of society rather than the individual ; but they had not worked out this habit of thought, and they had not the defence for their belief that we have. When the thing is put crudely (and they were often crude)—“ all pain is sent by God as a direct penalty for some definite sin ”—it was clearly false. It was not only false ; it was incredible, even to the Hebrews themselves. They did not argue, as we should do, that plague, pestilence and famine rise from causes which have nothing to do with human conduct, and therefore will afflict the good man in society as well as the bad. But they saw clearly enough that what they called punishments often found their way to people who deserved rewards, and that men who by all rules of justice ought to have been punished out of existence flourished as if the prizes of existence were theirs by right.

Traditional orthodoxy was plainly inadequate. Yet orthodoxy found, as it always does, plenty of good men to support it, or at least to add epicycle to cycle. “ The good suffer now, for some inscrutable reason ; or because they have not been wholly good—who has ? But wait, and you will see them recompensed at the last.” Or, “ they are never in deep misery ; you will never find the righteous begging his bread.” Or, “ the wicked, however prosperous, will always come to a bad end, or, at least, his children will.” But all this, however well meant, is only a tissue of subterfuges. Nor indeed is it true ; while to cover up the difficulties by pointing to the future or the next generation may be comforting, but it is certainly as unsatisfactory as to shirk the question of evil here and now by relegating it to a heaven or hell in the future.

THREE PROFOUND HEBREW INTERPRETATIONS

We are far too fond of our own easy ways of escape to cast stones at the Hebrew. But he was not always content with the glass houses which have often served

our turn. And we have three examples in the Old Testament of the eager and courageous attitude of mind that will accept no palliations or catch-words, that will refuse to look away from the actual and present evil to some different scene beyond, and that will insist on finding the solution, if solution there be, in the heart of the problem. Evil must prove itself in some deeper sense to be not evil but good ; or what are we to think of God ? These three examples are found in Jeremiah, the book of Job, and that collection of poems embedded in the latter half of the book of Isaiah, which are now generally called the Songs of the Suffering Servant.

Jeremiah, to those who take the trouble to make his acquaintance, stands out more clearly than any other figure in the Old Testament. Not only have we a larger mass of writing from him than from anyone else, with the single exception of Ezekiel ; he has flung himself without reserve into his writing, allowing us to hear again and again a deep and passionate *cri du cœur* that is exceptional among the prophets and seldom found even in the psalms. A genuine prophet, holding with unswerving loyalty to the convictions shared by that remarkable and unique band of preachers, he marks the middle point of their development, and his work turned the impetuous stream of their inspiration into a new and adventurous channel.

Of the author of the book of Job and his period we know nothing certain. We can only guess that he lived some two hundred years later than Jeremiah, when the Jewish community was beginning to be what it has been ever since, divided into two portions, the smaller in Palestine, the Jewish national home, the larger scattered abroad among the nations, and the Gentiles are already learning to spit upon the Jewish gaberdine. The Servant Songs, as we may call them, are separated from Jeremiah by about two generations ; but they are not, like Jeremiah's work, the product of a nation in the last throes of its struggle for independence, but of a

band of dispirited and even despairing exiles beside the waters of Babylon. And though they antedate the book of Job by more than a century, their point of view, so far from influencing that book, remains like some isolated castle or erratic boulder, distinct from the landscape, and yet seen last and remembered longest.

To none of these three, however—Jeremiah, the author of Job, or the poet of the Servant Songs—did the problem take the comparatively simple but menacing shape in which Mill forced it on his generation. Indeed, none of the prophets could have understood Mill at all, since to all of them the central fact of their experience was their country's sin. They did not pause to ask why Israel should have sinned; enough that Jehovah would and did punish sin. Such suffering, indeed, as the due and inevitable penalty of disobedience, was the guarantee of the divine justice, and therefore it was of positive value for religion. If there were no suffering, chaos would have come again. The real distress of the prophet arose from the disturbing fact that, to reflection, chaos *is* here. In spite of punishment, Israel still defies its God. Amos, a hundred and fifty years before Jeremiah, is lost in wonder that, after the most terrible disasters, Israel refused to return. The prophetic complaint, therefore, is not that the wrong people suffer, but that Jehovah's people defy him. But if so, what becomes of Jehovah's authority? Does he not care? Was he, like Baal to his frenzied priests on Mount Carmel, on a journey, or asleep? The amazed prophet might be full of zeal for Jehovah, but Jehovah looked on while his altars were thrown down and his prophets slain with the sword.

II

THE PROBLEM AS FELT BY THE PROPHETS

The problem was not a theoretical one, as with Dionysius the Areopagite or even Augustine. A note of

personal anguish may be heard, which may join us to the sufferers, or perhaps remove them to another world than ours. On the one hand, for the prophet, to see his own people, his flesh and blood, careering into a ruin which was inevitable and yet which might have been so easily avoided, was misery. This misery, indeed, was not felt by all the prophets. Amos, the Puritan of the South, surveying the "Restoration" morals of the Northern capital, could feel the Covenanter's stern joy in the destruction of the rebels. But Hosea and Jeremiah each knew that, when the nation to which they were sent was lost, they had lost their all. They knew the anguish of that later cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, . . . if thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes!" And on the other hand, how were they to think of God? He had commissioned them to turn a sinful society, by their prediction of coming doom, to obedience and morality. The society did not care; and the doom did not come. Which was the fool, the prophet or—God? And when, at last, the doom did break on them, the prophet was involved in the crash, and was God any better off? Instead of having a people who defied him, he was left without a people at all.

Such suggestions may sound crude and anthropomorphic to-day. We are not accustomed to think of God as caring for his own honour. God, we say, is love; if we can attribute to him any personal or human feelings, they must be the desires of the patient and tender father to allure his wandering son back to the despised paternal roof. Yet, if we did nothing but take this attractive conception a little more seriously, it would occur to us that such an authority must rate at a high value that truth and justice and purity without which no home would be really worth living in. The anthropomorphism of the Parable of the Prodigal Son leads straight back to the anthropomorphism of Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH

For it was on Jeremiah that this burden of the prophets pressed most heavily and pitilessly. Jeremiah was by no means the weeping prophet of popular imagination ; as little as Heraclitus, the fiery proclaimer of strife as the soul of the universe, was a weeping philosopher. His turbulent nature, rich in contrasts, was revealed at the very moment of his call. The narrative in his first chapter—surely a psychological document of remarkable importance—must be read as the experience of a youth at the instant when he is convinced that, like another Hamlet, he is to put right the times that are out of joint. And in the light of his future conflicts we can see the strange mixture of shrinking and indignation, isolation and sympathy, horror at the crimes he is to denounce, and expostulation at the suffering that God is going to inflict ; the simple ideals of country life that he longed for ; the resolution that set his face like a flint against the fevered passions of his age ; the hours of insight when the clouds broke and perplexities vanished, and he saw only the pointing finger ; and the darkness into which again and again he had to pass.

His life may be compared to a drama in five acts. In the first, immediately after his “ call,” he is tilting almost blindly against the outrageous follies of his society, beneath the shadow of an invasion by the dreaded Scythian raiders from the North. In the second, that danger has passed ; an authoritative document of religious law is discovered in the Temple ; and in consequence all religious authority is centralised at the capital, and the old local shrines, homes of superstition and worse, are destroyed. Meanwhile, the Assyrian empire, a far greater menace than ever the Scythians had been, totters and falls. In the third act, Egypt and Babylon begin the struggle for the sceptre that has dropped from Assyrian hands. Judæa, where the reformation of

cultus has soon proved incapable of effecting a reformation of morals, struggles hard to maintain her independence against both powers, and is subdued and overrun by the stronger and cleverer of the rivals, Babylon. In the fourth, Jerusalem is seen stripped and mutilated, yet clutching the shreds of its old independence to defy the power of Babylon—apparently whole-hearted and unanimous, except for the one “defeatist” voice of Jeremiah. The fifth and last act sees the city finally flung to the ground. Jeremiah is left as one of the few survivors in the country, till a fresh wave of calamity overtakes them all and he is dragged away with them, protesting vigorously against the migration, to Egypt. There his last recorded words are uttered, in unsparing denunciation of the idolatries which no calamity could tear out of the hearts of the men and women with whom he has lived his stormy and battered life.

In each act Jeremiah can be seen as the embodied and flouted conscience of his country. But, worse still, each act brings some piercing disappointment for himself. In spite of his prognostications, the Scythian danger passed; the religious reformation turned out to be an utter failure; and how, at best, could a law written in a book affect a change within the heart? The attempts at political independence and the project of rebellion against Babylon, against both of which he had warned his hot-headed countrymen, were pressed on in spite of him, to their inevitable result; and even at the last, ploughed and harrowed by disaster, Israel (what there was left of it) defied the prophet and the God who had sent him. To add to all this, he was, not unnaturally, the object of an abiding personal hostility; more than once the plots of his kinsmen—his fiercest enemies—threatened his life; and for all his longing for the placid joys of human companionship, he was never for a moment allowed to forget the isolation to which his divine vocation had condemned him.

THE "COLLOQUIES"

Life could hardly be more tragic than it was for such a man. That it did not end, as it might well have done, in the collapse of his own faith, is explained by a series of curious and pathetic conversations or colloquies which he describes himself as holding with Jehovah. In the first, he pours out to Jehovah all the bitterness of his heart, as he curses the day of his birth and the life's work which has turned every man's hand against him. In the second, he says plainly that Jehovah has made a fool of him ; in the third, in more chastened mood, he complains that his whole nature is diseased, and Jehovah, replying, " I know your nature well enough," bids him go on with his task. In the fourth, he cries, " I am hated by all." " Yet," Jehovah replies, " I have called you." " But I am solitary, and Jehovah is no better than an intermittent stream, whose waters, when they are looked for in the heats of summer, have dried up." " Separate the valuable from the worthless in your preaching," Jehovah answers, " and victory is still sure." In these touching passages we can hear, as it were, two voices in the prophet's heart ; the one, the natural and human—all too human ; the other, the utterance of a deep and unshakeable conviction in a divine though to him a far from intelligible order, in which, because it was divine, he could find refuge from the desolating riddle of the futility and wickedness around him.

A NEW ORDER IN THE FUTURE

A mere shirking of the difficulty, it may be said ; a retreat into obscurantism. It may be, though the cry of " ignoramus, ignorabimus " may rise from courage as well as from despair. But Jeremiah did not stop here. At one period of his life (we do not know when ; it may well have been just when his disillusionment

over the reformation of worship was at its worst ; or perhaps the prophecy is a combination of scattered utterances, which some would deny to Jeremiah altogether) he advanced to the prediction of something else besides calamity. In the future, he said, a new kind of religion would be revealed, neither of the priest nor of the prophet. It would depend on no rubric, handing down traditional ordinances of ritual or conduct from one age to another ; it would not even need the guidance of the inspired or instructed teacher. Jehovah's "torah" (a word which means at once "law" and "lore") would be written on men's hearts. Thus a new covenant or bargain would be drawn up by God with man. Impulse, thought, will, reason (for all this is what the "heart" signified to the Hebrew), would all move naturally about the poles of divine purpose and truth. And along with this would come a change, the prophet felt, in the fortunes of the nation. Scattered in exile no longer, they would again find their homes in their own country, but not now with an ambitious and soul-destroying policy of independence and wealth and military prowess ; they would return to a simple agricultural and peasant life, with its village festivals and its calm family industry and peace.

Such was the quiet consummation which would explain, as far as explanation was possible or necessary, the riddles of Jeremiah's painful life. Was it an explanation at all ? To our question, certainly not. But to Jeremiah's ? Undoubtedly it was. It showed him a way out of his difficulty. If the connection between suffering and sin was the last word of wisdom, Jeremiah could have found no way out. God was made a fool of. Suffering and sin both went on. But if suffering and sin together were to work a change which would banish both from life, the way out was at least beginning to appear. Through Jehovah's agreement or bargain with his people (mercifully one-sided as it was), and by the law written "on the heart," the human will swings

round to Jehovah's way ; sin comes to an end, and man is put in the right ("justified") with God ; while as a result he chooses a way of life which will automatically exclude the sufferings of the past. Nor does this demand a sudden interposition from the outside, a *deus ex machina*. True, it must come from God. Where else could it come from ? But, to the prophet, the long wearisome experience of the past has prepared for it ; though he cannot tell how it begins, he knows how it will end.

III

THE "WISDOM" LITERATURE

No prophet did more than Jeremiah to interpret the middle of Israel's history ; but the convictions to which he was led do not constitute a theodicy. The Hebrews, indeed, could hardly have attempted a theodicy before the exile. Till then they were occupied with their destiny, and their own relation to their nation. Only after the exile, when they were flung out of the world's life, and when at the same time they found themselves standing apart from the world, did they make any attempt to understand the will of God on earth. Slowly they began to collect a literature to which, as the *Wisdom of Solomon* has been given, the word "wisdom" was applied. The Hebrews not only had a sense of the divine ruler of the universe, but they had a sense of the sound common-sense of the divine will, which was clear and satisfactory.

The writers of the *Wisdom of Solomon* is rather too definite in its attitude to Israel's special position. It has discussed the nature of the law of love, and the commands that

universal revelation; and they were more interested in the cosmic designs of the creator than in Jehovah's purpose for his chosen nation. Their conception therefore, is rather strikingly modern. The later products of the school, indeed, such as Baruch and the book known as Fourth Esdras, dating from after the beginning of the Christian era, discuss the question of the origin of human sin with a nearer approach to the traditional theology of the Fall of Man than we find in the Pauline Epistles. But in the years nearer to the Exile, men were thinking more of suffering than of sin. Why do the good suffer as they do? They might have added, If they do suffer thus, can God be supreme? But they could not ask this. They had learnt too well the lesson of the prophet of the Exile whom we call the second Isaiah. Instead, they were driven to ask, With a non-moral order of society, can God, its author, be good? Yet even here, their interest was not merely theoretical. After all, they were not thinking of the topsy-turvy world but of the position of the good man in it. "Wigwam, what do you think?" he asks, "and how am I to act?" The problem, broadening from the nation to the world, comes down from society to the individual. The answer is only to be expected. As soon as we turn to the objects of our investigation in the book of Job, the limit is reached. For there we are not dealing with a man in whom any reader could find a happy broken wretch; we are dealing with a man; and the whole is permeated with amazing art.

educated people
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mission stripped

of all his vast fortune, his children, and his public position ; he is afflicted with a loathsome malady, and cast out, so to speak, into the gutter to die—or to continue to exist. But the author of the book, as we have it now, like another Shakespeare, sees far more in his materials than this. To him, Job's agony is really mental. There is very little reference in the body of the book to the actual calamities recorded in the introductory narrative—a circumstance which accounts for the strong impression of futility caused by the subsequent story of Job's restoration to affluence. The whole world had gone awry. Job had suffered a shock as grievous as that of Hamlet ; and, like Hamlet, he was crushed by the weary weight of its unintelligibility. A curious parallel to Jeremiah at once becomes apparent. There are indeed several reminiscences of Jeremiah in language and thought, which suggest that the author of Job had Jeremiah before him. And Job himself as he is portrayed in the book is far nearer to Jeremiah than to Hamlet. Both men see a world where God allows evil to run riot. Both have to drink the bitter cup of contempt and derision. Both ask, "How can I face it? I were better dead." But Job's vision is wider. Israel's sin is forgotten in a whole world in which God is defied, and where God is felt to defy, or to be false to, himself. And Job has no mission to others. There is no cause which he has to serve by separating the valuable from the worthless. He has simply to battle for his own soul.

It is difficult to resist the impression that we are reading an autobiography. The poignancy of Job's fevered expostulations suggests something more than an artistic fiction. The three "friends" are real ; so is Job's anguish. The author is not telling us of an imaginary or traditional character, but of himself. And this is not less probable because the structure of the book is so symmetrical. The original story (a piece of folk-lore, perhaps, as is suggested by the reference to Job in

Ezekiel), told in prose, serves as the introduction ; and the question of the demonic adversary, or " Satan," " Is Job's goodness genuine ? " properly means " Is your divine rule really obeyed and acknowledged ? " Then follows the dialogue between Job and his three visitors, occupying the main portion of the book, and written in sustained and exalted verse. The visitors, with varying degrees of outspokenness, maintain what may be called the orthodoxy of the book of Psalms— if the genuinely good suffer, it is only for a time ; a suffering that is more than temporary proves the sufferer to be a sinner. This is met by Job, in language sometimes desperately calm, sometimes wild and reckless and even blasphemous, with defiance, both of his visitors and of God. The dialogue is followed by a long address from a pompous youth named Elihu, who caricatures the arguments of the three previous speakers, and to whom Job deigns no reply. Then Jehovah answers (as if in response to Job's repeated demands) " from the whirlwind." But so far from defending himself or refusing either Job or Job's " friends," he confronts Job with the unfathomable mysteries of creation. Job confesses his self-confidence, and is then (in a prose epilogue) reinstated in more than his former splendour. Thus, in the course of the book, four separate views about evil are brought forward. It is a test ; a punishment ; a warning ; a means of education ; and all this against the background of Job's cry, " All is wrong ; for I am innocent," and Jehovah's assertion, " I am supreme and inscrutable."

THE STRUGGLE FOR FAITH

But, as we saw above, this is no mere problem. The author is struggling for his own old faith, that morality does and must bring the blessing of God ; he gives expression to what is, or has been, his creed, in the speeches of the " friends," now with dignity, now with

bluntness, and in a passage of unrivalled majesty which he puts into the mouth of Job (ch. 31). But he is also attacking this creed of his ; indeed, with such an example as Job before him, he sees that it is shattered, and he says so. The foundations are removed. And now, with the modern refuge of atheism or agnosticism closed to him, he is driven to think of God as a tyrant. That is the culminating horror of the situation. God is no better than a corrupt judge, to whom virtue and vice are as one, or who even takes a perverse and ghastly delight in injustice. To the casual reader, the " friends " are merely unsympathetic and even cruel. But sympathy would be beside the mark. They too are fighting for their souls. Job is fighting for his. Or rather, the battle-field is the mind and heart of the author. And in the end, the three are silenced. Orthodoxy can say no more ; and when Elihu does his pert best for it, Job has no more to say. Thus neither side actually answers the other. The real answer is *overheard*. For Job, even if only half aware of it, is like Jeremiah, conscious of two orders ; the first is the world before his eyes, where it is " all one " for the righteous as for the wicked ; goodness counts for nothing ; God pursues a driven leaf ; let thistles grow instead of barley ! But there is a second order. It is only glimpsed ; but the glimpses are worth all the rest. Job has a " witness " in heaven (ch. 16), and, as he cries later on, he will have a vindicator on earth (ch. 19). The thought is wholly undeveloped ; the vision is lost as soon as seen. Yet, if it were true—

*Worth how well . . .
That a man should struggle and agonise
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize,*

namely, the knowledge that God is even now watching the good man, unperturbed by the evil that seems to

challenge his own divine majesty, and that he will, at the last, appear plainly and victoriously on his side.

THE TWO "ORDERS"

At the end of the book God does appear ; but neither as a witness nor a vindicator. He makes no reference to the agonising struggle of thought that has preceded his appearance. Some have wondered whether his address is not a later addition. Has this parade of the wonder and variety of the universe anything to do with Job's protestation of his innocence? We must admit that it has. At first sight it might seem meant merely to "tease us out of thought," or to hint that the figure of the law court, where the plaintiff pours out his appeals before his callous judge, is beside the mark. But if we bear in mind the fundamental question, the book falls into shape. How will the good man meet the chaos of this world of experience? The plea of Job amounts to this, that he will never say that he is wrong when he is right, even though God should send him to hell for doing so. Righteousness matters more than anything else. It is at the heart of the only universe that the good man can conceive himself as living in. The first order is subordinate to the second. And the answer of Jehovah takes up the second order, as glimpsed by Job, and transfigures and crowns it with all the majesty of earth and sky.

IV

ARE BOTH ORDERS REAL?

To most of those who have entered deeply into the riddle of evil, the phenomenon of the two voices, as heard in Jeremiah and Job, will not be unfamiliar, whether, as in Jeremiah, the first voice shrinks from the sternness of the power behind human life and the second asserts it, or, as in Job, the first reiterates the simple connection

between pain and sin, and the second holds to goodness as something lifted above both happiness and misery. And they will also find themselves at home with the conception of the two orders, whether, like Jeremiah, they think of the second as growing out of and replacing the first, or, like Job, as surrounding and transcending it all the time. And yet, which order is the real, and which the unreal? It is indeed useless to say that the first is unreal and the second is real. For the first is there; it is there for the galley slave, the martyr, the man who is dying of cancer or paralysis of the insane—for all of us. If it is there, how can we escape from it or conquer it? And if the second is real, can we find our way into that real world? If not, what is the good of talking about it? No good at all, unless it is possible to conceive of the two worlds as united by a bridge. If we are simply to despair of the second, or wait till by some miracle-working word the first passes away, faith will find it hard to endure. But if we can see a way leading out of that evil order and built within it, we may in our endurance gain possession of our souls.

THE "SUFFERING SERVANT"

An attempt at some such achievement as this is made in the third of our examples of Old Testament thought. Embedded in the later chapters of the book of Isaiah are four poems, which, if read consecutively, and apart from their contexts, prove to be the portrait of a character whose history is thus described in four separate scenes. Into the critical process by which these poems are disentangled, it is unnecessary to enter. It is enough to say that nowhere else is the Servant of Jehovah, the subject of these poems, referred to as an individual, save where he is identified with Cyrus the Persian conqueror; and that the whole conception of salvation which we shall have to observe is foreign to the surrounding prophecies. At the beginning of each poem there is a

distinct break separating it quite clearly from what has gone before, though in three instances out of the four an editor has attempted to link on the poem to what follows. The later chapters of Isaiah are full of the approaching deliverance of the Jewish exiles, actually accomplished by the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. The only doubt that clouds the prophet's vision is—will the exiles be prepared to take advantage of this heaven-sent boon? But in these poems there is no thought of actual deliverance or return. The author describes a teacher rather than a conqueror. In the surrounding prophecies the Gentiles are to see the salvation of Israel; in the poems they are themselves to be saved. Had the author a definite individual in mind or only an idealised figure representing the nation at its best? The portraiture is so detailed that many attempts at identification have been made—Jeremiah, Zerubbabel, Moses, and even the author himself. All these must remain doubtful. More, however, is to be learnt from the study of the portrait.

THE FOUR "SERVANT" POEMS

The first of the poems, in which Jehovah is the speaker, describes the call of the Servant. He has been specially chosen (as was Jeremiah); the breath or spirit of Jehovah rests on him; he will find all the support he needs. He is not to be a prophet, raising his voice in public and living in conflict with opponents; rather, a teacher, whose instruction will bring order and harmony to the whole human race. Here we have clearly the early conviction of the hero. In the second poem he has started upon his work, and is disillusioned. He is convinced (again like Jeremiah) that his work has all come to nothing. But he is reminded that he has narrowed his vision; his mission is not to the nation which has neglected him, but to the world. In the third poem, as in the second, the servant is the speaker. He has been

performing his daily task, receiving and transmitting the divine message, only to meet with the bitterest opposition ; but he has refused to give way, and defines his persecutors. The fourth poem, more elaborate than the rest, intensifies the picture of contempt and hatred, and describes it as something more virulent than either Jeremiah or Job had to endure, and ending in the Servant's miserable and unresisting death. But, in language as striking as it is elusive, he is represented, first, as suffering for the benefit of his persecutors, and secondly, as rising to life again and in so doing setting them right with the God through whose will he had submitted to his terrible fate. His place is not at the dawn of restoration, but in the dark hour of helpless suffering.

There is much in all this to suggest Jeremiah, and if we had only the first three poems, we might think of an idealised sketch of the prophet. We should indeed miss in the portrait the darker moments with which Jeremiah has made us familiar in his "colloquies." There is less of Paracelsus as Browning described his career for us, and more of Luther, the intrepid scholar and disputant, challenging a whole skyful of Duke Georges on his road to Worms. The Servant would be noteworthy, chiefly, as a type of the heaven-sent messenger of truth and his fate. But when we pass to the fourth of the songs, we are in a different atmosphere. The structure is much more elaborate, and its five stanzas correspond to five distinct stages in the action. It is as if a veil had been removed, and the poet suddenly found his subject illuminated, showing him "the very pulse of the machine." In the first stanza Jehovah introduces the final act by describing the astonishing exaltation which was to crown the Servant's career. In the second the human spectators elaborate this by dwelling on his deplorable condition and loathsome appearance. He seemed to them to be bearing the visible curse of God. The middle stanza, which, as so often in Hebrew poetry, seems fitted for the keystone of the arch, contains the

spectators' startled discovery that the burden he was bearing was properly their own, and that his suffering brought relief and healing to them. The fourth stanza carries on the story of his fate to his death by a violent travesty of justice, and his ignominious burial, and the fifth tells of his triumphant resuscitation (here Jehovah is again the speaker) and the communication of his own goodness and wisdom to those whose sins and misery he had shared. Men might be surprised and bewildered ; God had planned it out from the beginning. Scholars have compared the poem with the Aeschylean picture of Prometheus, and even suggested some connection between the two. But there is a world of difference between that grim sufferer in the Caucasus, who upbraids his divine tormentor as wildly as Job, and the meek and persecuted teacher who, in the moment of death, is carrying out the gracious will of God.

THE SUFFERER AND JESUS

It would be more to the purpose to point out how curiously the portrait anticipates the central figure of the New Testament. None of the four poems can be said to "foretell" Jesus. Jesus never complained that he had laboured in vain ; he never turned on his persecutors ; his appearance never aroused disgust ; nor do the poems hint at the actual circumstances of his death at Calvary. Yet if we are to look in history for one who was held to be a teacher sent from God to instruct the whole of mankind, who was rejected by his contemporaries and condemned to death as an impious charlatan, but whose suffering was in reality borne for the sake of his enemies, and who by his death and his rising had brought salvation to sinful men and set them right, as he himself was right, with God, where do we find him save in the Jesus of the Christian faith ? The subject of these four poems, and especially the last, has, in fact, influenced profoundly both the language and the thought of every part of the New

Testament, and we may even ask whether the early Church could have interpreted the significance of Jesus as it did if the picture of the Suffering Servant had not been constantly in the background of their memories of his brief career.

“ BEARING ” SUFFERING AND SIN

Three times, in the last poem, the Servant is said to bear the burden of his contemporaries, their sufferings and their sins. The word in the Hebrew has a double meaning, to carry, as a load on one's shoulders, and to carry away. For the most part, it is used in the language of the ritual law for bearing the consequence of one's own carelessness or wrong-doing. A man bears his guilt or his shame until some ceremonial act sets him free. But can anyone bear the burden that belongs to another? There was no provision in the ritual law for his, nor were the sacrifices ever represented as making it possible. They helped a man, somehow, to get rid of his burden; they did not transfer it to the sacrificial victim. Yet sympathy and love may bear another's burden. A mother can bear the shame of her son; a man may even bear the shame of his friend. This was the discovery made by the contemporaries of the Servant. He was bearing the misery that flowed from their sin, the misery of a world gone wrong.

Such sympathy and companionship, if it could be understood, would have a deep meaning for any sufferer. The possession of a genuine companion and friend in their misery was the solace denied to both Jeremiah and Job. But our poem points to more than this. To bear is to bear away. “By his stripes we are healed.” That is to say, when they find someone who shares their misery, they find someone who removes it. Here we seem to come upon a law or principle of vicarious bearing, not of punishment, but of sin. And it finds its first formulation in this fourth poem. “He shall put the

many in the right, for he shall bear their iniquities." The principle, as we have seen, is not to be found in the sacrificial ritual. Yet there is a curious suggestion of it in the pagan survival of the ceremony of the scapegoat. The scapegoat, regarded as belonging to the malevolent powers of the demon world, is solemnly loaded with the community's sin, accumulated through the past year, and driven out, with the sinister burden on its back, to perish in the wilderness. Parallels to the practice have been found in almost all parts of the world. It is based on the primitive belief that sin is something quasi-material, and therefore can be passed on from one object to another.

But there is this difference between the helpless and ignorant animal (familiar to us from Holman Hunt's touching picture) and the Servant who sets his face like a flint to do the will of his God. The Servant loads upon himself the numbing and desolating burden. It is no wonder that the New Testament doctrine of Christ's atonement or reconciliation has been connected with this presentation. Nor can the actual statements in the New Testament afford to dispense with the poem. In the New Testament we have for the most part a group of metaphors to describe the transaction, drawn from the law court, the ritual of the altar, and the slave-market. Here we have a plainer and less figurative statement. Men are in the wrong ; the Servant is in the right ; he enters their distracted world and bears its burden ; hence, he can put them in the right, or, as the Christian expresses it, through his obedience, carried up to the point of death, sinful men have their access to the Father. No view of the Atonement can satisfy us which does not start from the poem of the Servant.

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS

Our concern, however, is not with the principle of reconciliation, but with the intelligibility of the two orders, as we have called them, in our experience. What

light do our four poems shed upon this ? In the first place, their writer is firmly conscious, like Jeremiah and the author of Job, that there is not one order only, but two ; the order in this world, which is no order but a chaos ; and the order that embodies the wisdom and goodness of God. Secondly, that between these orders there is a bridge ; that it is possible to pass from one to the other ; that the second is as real as the first. Thirdly (and here is the peculiar importance of the last poem), that the journey across the bridge (if we may keep up our figure) has to be made from the second order to the first, and not in the opposite and more obvious direction. It is hopeless for those who dwell in the first order to look for escape ; they must wait for release. This release must come from the other side. When a member of that second order, inspired as he will naturally be with love, energy, a passion for goodness, and an eager desire to share all that he has of value, enters the first order, he will by his very power of compassion experience in a measure all that the Suffering Servant knew of the grief and shame of his new companions. But when at last they understand what he is doing, and the devotion that prompts it, they will be drawn to his side, and, instead of the old fatal selfishness and sin, they will enter into this purity and inward peace, and share it with him. He has crossed the bridge to them ; they will cross it, to the other side, with him.

Naturally the Christian understands all this as an interpretation of the Atonement, as a transaction carried out by Christ in this world of time. It is this ; but it is more. For the two orders are neither spatial nor temporal. Any one of us may be dwelling in either of them at any moment. And what we have called the crossing of the bridge is accomplished when the angels of love and sympathy within the heart lead to the contact of the spirit with " the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost." If we can do this, the Christian will add, it is only because Christ has done it ; we can do it through him.

All the same, we can do it ; and the great law of reconciliation can find its fulfilment in every human life.

Thus we have an answer to the question, "What will the good man do in the face of suffering?" What of the other question, "Why suffering and evil at all, in a world designed by God?" Doubtless the designer of the world might have been satisfied with a single order, the second, as we have called it. But he was not. To him, attainment was better than mere possession. Nor indeed could the second order have been complete if it had existed alone. For the self-forgetting devotion which it implies would have been impossible, if there had not been another order to be invaded and blessed. If the ultimate good for man is what we call happiness or bliss, dependent on some object to be held fast, some state of mind to be enjoyed, suffering might well be unintelligible. But if all genuine good is a function or activity, and if my noblest activity is to bear another's burden in order to share with him what I cannot be satisfied to keep to myself, the first order must be the by the side of the second. And, to the mind of God, who has not only planned this activity but *is* it, the joy that it brings, both to the sufferer and the Deliverer, must outweigh all the evil in whose midst it comes to itself. However terrible and loathsome may be the mass of human misery, ferocity, and crime, when contemplated by itself, yet, seen by the side of another order, it becomes an element in the life of that larger cosmos where the two orders, as we know them, are combined into one. Viewed as part of that cosmos, this lower order of pain and evil becomes a veritable house or dwelling of God, wherein is set the bridge across which pass the ministering spirits and those whom these spirits have drawn into their beautiful activities ; or, to change the figure, amid our sore loss, we can still

*. . . . see the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched between heaven and Charing Cross.*

Such is the view of evil to which these ancient Hebrew thinkers appear to lead us. And if it should seem austere or hard, at least it allows us to think of God as one and supreme ; and it enables us to face the world, even at its worst and most chaotic, with a constant mind, and with the faith that can pluck from the heart of what a man might call despair the flower of victory and peace.

School of Theology
at Claremont

A NOTE ON BOOKS

THE general problem of evil has been discussed in all philosophies of religion; nor can any philosophical system avoid it. Yet comparatively few modern philosophical works have been devoted to it. The reader however, will find some representative attitudes to the question in the following:

J. Hinton, *The Mystery of Pain* (1866).

J. S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (1874).

Martineau, *Study of Religion* (1887).

Lotze, *Microcosmus* (English translation, 1890).

F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (2nd ed., 1906).

Rashdall, *Theory of Good and Evil* (1906).

Galloway, *Philosophy of Religion* (1912).

The three Hebrew authors referred to may be studied conveniently in the commentaries on Jeremiah, Job, and Isaiah published either in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools* or *The Century Bible* (Nelson). Reference should also be made to Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (a close and illuminating study of Jeremiah and of Hebrew prophecy generally, 1922), Cheyne, *Job and Solomon* (1887), Peake, *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament* (1904), and Levi, *Deutero-Isaiah* (1927).

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